

STARS AND STRIPES®

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A news digest for U.S. forces serving overseas

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Nashville hit as tornadoes rip through Tenn.

Associated Press

NASHVILLE, Tenn. — Tornadoes ripped across Tennessee as people slept early Tuesday, shredding at least 140 buildings and killing at least 22 people. Authorities described painstaking efforts to find survivors in piles of rubble and wrecked basements as the death toll climbed.

One twister caused severe damage across a 10-mile stretch of downtown Nashville, wrecking businesses and homes and destroying the tower and stained glass of a historic church. Another erased homes from their foundations along a two-mile path in Putnam County.

Daybreak revealed a landscape littered with blown-down walls and roofs, snapped power lines and huge broken trees, leaving city streets in gridlock. Schools, courts, transit lines, an airport and the state Capitol

were closed.

More than a dozen polling stations were damaged, forcing Super Tuesday voters to wait in long lines at alternative sites.

The death toll jumped to 22 as first responders gingerly pulled apart the wreckage, hoping to find people alive in the rubble of their homes. Putnam Sheriff Eddie Farris said only 30% of the disaster area had a “hard check” by midday. “A lot of these homes had basements and we’re hopeful there are still people down in there,” he said.

Nashville residents walked around in dismay as emergency crews closed off roads. Roofs had been torn off apartment buildings, large trees uprooted and debris littered many sidewalks.

“It is heartbreaking. We have had loss of life all across the state,” said Gov. Bill Lee. He ordered nonessential state

workers to stay home just before he was set to fly in a helicopter to survey damage.

President Donald Trump announced plans to visit the disaster area on Friday. “We send our love and our prayers of the nation to every family that was affected,” he said. “We will get there, and we will recover, and we will rebuild, and we will help them.”

The tornadoes were spawned by a line of severe storms that stretched from Alabama into western Pennsylvania.

In Nashville, the twister’s path was mostly north and east of the heart of downtown, sparing many of its biggest tourism draws — the honky tonks of Broadway, the Grand Ole Opry House, the storied Ryman Auditorium, and the convention center.

With more than a dozen Super Tuesday locations in Nashville’s Davidson County

damaged, voters were sent to other locations, some of them with long lines. Tennessee’s Secretary of State delayed opening polls in the disaster area for an hour, but said they would close as scheduled Tuesday night.

“Anyone that wants to vote, we want to create an opportunity for you,” Davidson County elections administrator Jeff Roberts said. Because poll workers will be navigating through a damaged city to deliver results Tuesday night, he said the tallying may take longer than anticipated.

Hundreds of people went to a Red Cross shelter for displaced residents at the Nashville Farmers Market, just north of the state capitol, but a power outage there forced them to move again to the Centennial Sportsplex.

Navy is overhauling its education system

Associated Press

PROVIDENCE, R.I. — The U.S. Navy is overhauling its approach to education because the nation no longer has a massive economic and technological edge over potential adversaries, according to a strategy released Monday.

The Education for Seapower Strategy 2020, provided to The Associated Press ahead of its release, is the first unified, comprehensive education strategy for the Navy and Marine Corps, said John Kroger, who is implementing the strategy as the Navy’s first chief learning officer.

It is very much a response to the nation’s geopolitical position in the world today, versus the advantages it had at the end of the Cold War, Kroger said, noting China’s economic strength and investments in 5G networks, energy storage and other major technologies that matter for war-fighting.

The Navy wants to create a naval community college to provide associate’s degrees to tens of thousands of young sailors and Marines, at no cost to them. It plans to unify the schools within the existing naval university system, similar to a state university system, and invest in them, as well as enact new policies to encourage and reward those who pursue professional military and civilian education.

“In a world where potential adversaries are peers economically and technologically, how do you win?” Kroger said in an interview. “We think we can out-fight potential opponents because we can out-think them. In order to do that, we must have, by far, the best military education program in the world.”

Though the need to ensure an advantage in fighting wars is driving the reforms, Kroger said, the educational opportunities will change how and whom the Navy

recruits. It’s more challenging to recruit when there’s relatively low unemployment, he said.

The strategy does not specifically say how much the Navy is looking to spend on education or where the money will come from. Kroger said it will rely mostly on existing education funding that can be used in a more cost-effective way.

The Navy will ask Congress for more money for education beginning in fiscal year 2022, but the numbers aren’t finalized, Kroger said.

There would not be a physical community college campus. Some general education classes would be provided online, but sailors and Marines would do the vast majority of their coursework online through civilian universities and community colleges that partner with the Navy. The Navy plans to seek approval from Congress this year and enroll the first students next year.

Two key Republicans resist Taliban deal

BY STEVE BEYNON

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Sen. Lindsey Graham, one of President Donald Trump's closest allies in Congress, on Monday warned against a quick military exit from Afghanistan and implored that a small contingent of U.S. forces must stay in the country to thwart attacks on the homeland from extremist groups.

"Let's don't do in Afghanistan what [President Barack] Obama did in Iraq — pull the plug on the place and allow radical Islam to come roar-

ing back," the Republican from South Carolina said on the "Fox & Friends" television show. "We're going to need a residual U.S. force for years to come because I don't trust the Taliban to police al-Qaida and [Islamic State], we need some of our forces in place. That's what Obama failed to do."

Hostilities in Afghanistan quickly resumed Monday, two days after the signing of the U.S.-Taliban deal, which intended to start a 14-month withdrawal of U.S. and allied forces in exchange for the Taliban's halting of its attacks on Western powers and conduct-

ing peace talks with the Kabul government.

Trump has long sought to fulfill a key campaign promise of pulling American troops out of Afghanistan. Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the top Republican on the House Armed Services Committee, however, also questioned the deal Monday.

"It is not clear to me what conditions would lead to complete withdrawal in 14 months," Thornberry said at an event at the Brookings Institution, a liberal-leaning Washington think tank. "Who decides whether those conditions have been

met?"

The deal calls for 5,000 Taliban prisoners to be released by March 10, in exchange for 1,000 prisoners held in captivity by the Taliban. Afghanistan President Ashraf Ghani said Sunday, however, that it is Kabul, not the U.S., that has the authority to dictate whether or not prisoners are released.

"If this [peace deal] is a withdrawal document, then Afghanistan will fall apart and civil war will emerge," Graham said. "Women will go back into the darkness, and al-Qaida and ISIS will come forward again to threaten us."

New combat ship honors Hall of Fame veterans

BY CHRISTIAN LOPEZ

Stars and Stripes

The Navy christened its newest littoral combat ship over the weekend, the USS Cooperstown, even as it looks to downsize its inventory of vessels in the same class.

Alba Tull, wife of billionaire film producer Thomas Tull, broke the traditional bottle of sparkling wine across the Cooperstown's bow Saturday at the Fincantieri Marinette Marine shipyard in Wisconsin.

The Cooperstown is the 12th ship of its kind, the Freedom variant, of 16 the Navy contracted with Lockheed Martin to build. Austal USA contracted to build another 19. The proposed Defense Department spending plan that was released in February calls for decommissioning the first four littoral combat ships.

The Cooperstown is expected to undergo sea trials later this year before going into service. Although the Navy has signaled its intent to curtail acquisition of littorals and build frigates instead, the littoral combat ships have been at work in the Pacific

region.

The 377-foot-long Cooperstown can reach speeds of over 54 mph. It carries a crew of 50 sailors and one MH-60R/S Seahawk helicopter and one MQ-8 Fire Scout unmanned, autonomous helicopter.

Jane Forbes Clark, chairman of the board of directors of The National Baseball Hall of Fame and Museum, in Cooperstown, N.Y., gave the principal address during the christening ceremony. Acting Secretary of the Navy Thomas Modly also spoke.

"The dedication and skilled work of everyone involved in the building of this ship has ensured that it will represent the great city of Cooperstown and serve our Navy and Marine Corps team for decades to come," Modly said in a Navy statement.

Cooperstown is the first ship to be named after the city in New York. It received its name during a National Baseball Hall of Fame ceremony on July 25, 2015, honoring the 64 veterans, all members of the Hall, who served from the Civil War to Korean War.

Pacific commander tapped to become USAF chief

BY COREY DICKSTEIN

Stars and Stripes

WASHINGTON — Gen. Charles Q. Brown Jr. was nominated Monday to become the next Air Force chief of staff, a selection that would make him the first African American to serve as the top uniformed leader of a U.S. military service.

Brown would replace Gen. David Goldfein, the current Air Force chief of staff, who is expected to retire in the summer. Brown, known as "CQ," now commands U.S. Air Forces Pacific, which is responsible for Air Force operations in the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command area of operations.

Brown is a battle-tested fighter pilot who commanded air forces operating in the Middle East — against the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria — and Afghanistan.

Goldfein tweeted his congratulations to Brown after his nomination was announced.

"He's led worldwide — in the Pacific, Europe, the Middle East and Africa," the Air Force chief said of Brown.

"When it comes to global, operational savvy, there's nobody stronger — one of the finest warriors our [Air Force] has ever produced."

Brown is an F-16 pilot with nearly 3,000 flight hours, including some 130 in combat, according to the Air Force. During his 34 years in the military, he has piloted more than a dozen other aircraft, according to his official biography.

He has commanded a fighter squadron, the U.S. Air Force Weapons School, two fighter wings and served as an adviser to past top Air Force uniformed and civilian leaders. He served as the No. 2 general for U.S. Central Command from July 2016 to July 2018, according to his biography.

If confirmed by the Senate, Brown would become the 22nd Air Force chief. He would also become the first black military service chief. Retired Army Gen. Colin Powell served as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1989 to 1993, but he was never Army chief of staff.

Fed cuts interest rate; virus moves West

Associated Press

PARIS — The coronavirus crisis shifted increasingly westward toward Europe and the United States on Tuesday, with governments taking emergency steps to ease shortages of face masks for front-line doctors and nurses and the U.S. Federal Reserve announcing the biggest interest-rate cut in over a decade to fend off damage to the economy.

The virus reached deep into Iran's government, where 23 members of Parliament and the head of the country's emergency services were reported infected. South Korea started drive-thru testing. The French government announced it would requisition supplies of protective masks, while the U.S. relaxed restrictions on the kind of masks American health care workers can use.

In Spain's Basque region, where at least five doctors and nurses were nearly infected, nearly 100 health care workers were being held in isolation.

"We are concerned that countries' abilities to respond are being compromised by the severe and increasing disruption to the global supply of personal protective equipment, caused by rising demand, hoarding and misuse," said the World Health Organization's director-general, Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. "We can't stop COVID-19 without protecting our health workers."

The mushrooming outbreaks contrasted with optimism in China, where thousands of recovered patients were going home and the number of new infections dropped to the lowest level in several weeks.

On Wall Street, stocks jumped after the

Troops return to Italy after Israeli exercise canceled

BY NANCY MONTGOMERY

Stars and Stripes

VICENZA, Italy — About 60 U.S. paratroopers who traveled to Israel returned abruptly to their base in Italy last week after Israeli measures to contain the new coronavirus forced an exercise to be canceled.

The troops were among 300 U.S. Army paratroopers from the 173rd Airborne Brigade planning to participate in the exercise Eagle Genesis with Israel Defense Forces ground troops this month.

The decision aligned with Israeli travel restrictions and was "purely a precautionary measure," Lt. Cmdr. Joe Hontz, a U.S. European Command spokesman, said in an email.

"In close coordination with the Israeli government and out of an abundance of caution in the face of the evolving situation with COVID-19, the decision

has been made to cancel the exercise," Hontz said. "We value our strong partnership with Israel and look forward to continuing training together in the future."

Meanwhile, EUCOM announced Tuesday that the biennial U.S.-Israel ballistic missile defense exercise Juniper Cobra had begun. The exercise includes more than 600 U.S. troops at spots throughout Israel. It was unclear Tuesday if any of those troops were based in Italy.

No U.S. troops in Europe have been diagnosed with COVID-19, the disease caused by the new coronavirus. A soldier in South Korea is the only service member known to have contracted the virus, though some military dependents in South Korea and Japan have also tested positive.

Israel is one of several countries to restrict travelers from Italy.

Federal Reserve announced the emergency rate cut. Fed Chairman Jerome Powell said the virus "will surely weigh on economic activity both here and abroad for some time." The U.S. count of COVID-19 cases topped 100, spread across at least 11

states. Six people have died, all in Washington state. Capitol Hill aides said negotiations are nearing completion on an emergency bill to fund the development of a vaccine and offer disaster loans to businesses hurt by the crisis.

Nomination of official who had Ukraine concerns pulled

The Washington Post

The White House on Monday pulled the nomination of a Pentagon official who gained prominence because of concerns she raised about withholding military aid for Ukraine.

In a statement, the White House said it had withdrawn the nomination of Elaine McCusker as Pentagon comptroller, a position she has held on an acting basis. It provided no reason why McCusker, a career civil servant who was nominated to be confirmed in the job in November, would no longer be considered.

The decision is likely to deepen concerns about whether the Trump administration is singling out officials seen as playing a role unfavorable to the president in matters related to his impeachment. It follows the departure last month of John Rood, a

top policy official who likewise was a leading figure in the Pentagon's response to the delay of security aid to Ukraine, an issue that became central to the impeachment proceedings against President Donald Trump.

The president was acquitted of impeachment charges during a Senate vote in February. The trial stemmed from Democrats' assertions that the president had improperly withheld more than \$300 million in assistance to Ukraine to force the country's government to conduct an investigation into former Vice President Joe Biden, a top political rival, and his son.

Emails made public in recent months show that McCusker voiced concerns to White House budget officials last year about the delay in delivering congressional approved aid to Ukraine.

Other individuals who were pushed out of their positions after providing testimony critical of the president's version of events include Lt. Col. Alexander Vindman, who served as a White House national security official for Ukraine matters, and Gordon Sondland, the former ambassador to the European Union.

The Defense Department did not provide an immediate comment.

Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., the ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, called McCusker "another casualty of the Trump Administration's efforts to purge public servants who put country before fealty to the President."

"Ms. McCusker is paying the price for trying to ensure that the Administration followed the law," Reed said in a statement.

Troop counts could tip congressional balance

CQ Roll Call

WASHINGTON — The Census Bureau's new system for counting troops deployed abroad could make a difference in states such as North Carolina and Texas, which have sizable military populations and are already poised to gain congressional seats.

Deciding which state gets the last seat in Congress during reapportionment could well come down to a few thousand — or a few hundred — people. And the Census Bureau's new system for counting U.S. troops abroad could make the difference in the count that starts in March.

Federal law mandates the Census Bureau count all U.S. residents, but exactly how the agency counts them can have a major impact on the distribution of about \$1.5 trillion in federal funding as well as 435 seats in Congress.

In years past, the census counted all military members who were serving overseas as residents of whatever home state they listed on their Pentagon paperwork. That's changed for the 2020 count: The Census Bureau will distinguish between military members stationed abroad long term — in Germany or Japan, for example — and

personnel deployed temporarily, such as a monthslong assignment in Kuwait.

That means a soldier deployed abroad from, say, Fort Bragg, will be counted in North Carolina where the military installation is housed, even if the service member listed Florida as an official residence.

The Census Bureau used to attribute deployed personnel back to their "home of record," which often was Florida, Texas or another state that does not have income taxes.

That old counting method may have cost North Carolina a congressional seat in 2010, said Bob Coats, the governor's census liaison at the Office of State Budget and Management.

It also may have lowered the federal funds sent to military areas, and made local planning for things like schools more difficult — even if the change didn't shift congressional seats.

Census Bureau officials made the change in 2018 as it finalized its counting rules and after pressure from North Carolina and other states to count temporarily deployed personnel differently. Previously, the census counted all troops abroad back to their

U.S. "home of record" for apportionment purposes — simply adding them to the total population of a state.

The change for this decade now will add deployed personnel in their community of residence in local census data, not just the total state population. During the rulemaking process for the change, commenters noted that "surges" of deployments could result in significant undercounts in military communities, making it more difficult to plan for schools, housing, transportation and other resources.

While the Census Bureau's change includes all government employees on temporary duty, several experts said the deployed troops would be the largest affected group. The Defense Department stopped publishing data about the number of personnel deployed abroad in December 2017, when the nation had about 70,000 troops abroad.

The states where the change could have the largest impact are those with the largest military populations: Texas, California and North Carolina. They're also the states expecting a shift in congressional representation.

Netanyahu's party ahead but short of majority in vote

Associated Press

JERUSALEM — Israel's embattled Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu faced an uncertain path to staying in office Tuesday, even as preliminary results showed his Likud party pulling ahead of its opponents in the country's third election in less than a year.

Exit polls on Israeli TV stations showed Likud and its allies capturing 59 seats out of the 120 in parliament. That would still put Likud and its ultra-religious and nationalist bloc short of the parliamentary

majority required to form a government.

With roughly 90% of votes already counted, Netanyahu's bloc looked to be maintaining its lead. Final results were expected to be announced later Tuesday and could swing Netanyahu over the top — two weeks before he goes on trial to face corruption charges.

But if the official results match the exit polls, and Netanyahu's camp is unable to draw in defectors from the opposing camp, Israel's prolonged political gridlock could continue with the prospect of a fourth election.

The uncertainty didn't stop Netanyahu from declaring victory early Tuesday in front of a raucous crowd of supporters.

"This is a victory against all the odds, because we stood against powerful forces," he said. "They already eulogized us. Our opponents said the Netanyahu era is over."

He vowed to immediately begin work to form a new coalition and press forward with a hard-line agenda that includes annexing large parts of the West Bank — a step that would undermine any remaining hopes of establishing a Palestinian state.

Migrants look for way around closed Turkey-Greece border

Associated Press

KASTANIES, Greece — Thousands of migrants searched for ways to cross Greece's border with Turkey on Tuesday, as Athens ramped up its diplomatic efforts to get help from the European Union to seal off its eastern land and sea frontiers.

Turkey has made good on a threat announced Thursday to open its borders for those seeking to cross illegally into Eu-

rope. Many of those hoping to enter Greece were trying their luck by wading or rowing across the Evros River that runs along most of the length of the Turkish frontier.

The action by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan triggered days of violent clashes and scenes of chaos at the border. Greece has struggled to push back the wave of migrants, with its armed forces now leading the effort.

The government has accused Turkey of

causing a risk to its national security, and has imposed emergency measures to carry out summary deportations and deny migrants the right to apply for international protection for one month.

Also from Turkey, reports Tuesday said clashes in Syria continued, with Turkey shooting down a Syrian fighter jet in Syria's Idlib province.

That is the third such incident in as many days.

AMERICAN ROUNDUP

Man accused of openly wielding BB gun at bar

DE REHOBOTH BEACH — Police in Delaware arrested a man accused of entering a bar and pointing a BB gun made to look like a handgun at people gathered inside, authorities confirmed.

Patrons and workers at a Rehoboth Beach bar reported that an agitated man had grabbed an employee and pointed a gun at others inside the establishment, the city's police department said in a statement.

An officer saw the suspect walking down the road afterward, then spotted him stashing what appeared to be a gun inside a tree, the police statement said. Officers found the weapon and determined that it was a BB gun made to look like a .40-caliber handgun.

Bryan P. Meck, 28, was charged with three counts of felony aggravated menacing, carrying a concealed dangerous instrument, offensive touching and disorderly conduct.

Once declared dead, man appeals execution

LA NEW ORLEANS — Lawyers for a man who had been declared legally dead before he was found, arrested and convicted in the slaying of a 12-year-old girl are set to ask an appeals court to overturn his federal conviction and death sentence.

Thomas Steven Sanders went missing after he left his Mississippi family in 1987 and had been declared legally dead in 1994.

But he was found alive and arrested in Gulfport, Miss., as the result of an investigation into the 2010 death of a woman in Arizona — and the kidnapping and killing of her daughter in Louisiana.

A federal jury in Louisiana convicted him and sentenced him to death for the kidnapping and killing of the girl, Lexis Roberts.

Police: Girl lied about fake officer assault

AL OPELIKA — Police in east Alabama said that a teenage girl was lying when she claimed a man impersonating a police officer sexually assaulted her.

The Opelika Police Department told WTVM-TV that detectives re-created the incident, which was reported Feb. 19. They said that once the teen who claimed the assault was confronted with surveillance video from multiple sources, she admitted that she was lying.

Police say they're continuing to investigate, now focusing on the false report. No criminal charges have yet been filed.

2 arrested in fraudulent stolen checks scheme

AZ SIERRA VISTA — Cochise County Sheriff's officials said that two suspects were arrested in connection with a fraudulent scheme involving stolen checks. They said that checks were stolen from an automotive group in Sierra Vista and then forged and cashed at various banks.

A search warrant was issued for a Bisbee residence and a vehicle. Sheriff's officials said that checks cashed before the search warrant totaled over \$3,000. There also were more than 30 uncashed checks that were recovered.

Authorities said that Gloria Burton, 52, and her son Charles, 31, were booked into the county jail on suspicion of theft, fraud, forgery and conspiracy.

Sheriff's officials said that

Gloria Burton was an employee of the automotive group.

Officials answer call for battlefield park repairs

MS VICKSBURG — The mayor of Vicksburg said federal officials are responding to his call for attention to road and erosion damage that have closed nearly a third of Vicksburg National Military Park after a winter of heavy rains.

The Vicksburg Post reported that a National Park Service incident management team is expected to be at the park to stabilize some areas and make plans for more permanent repairs.

The park is the site of one of the Civil War's most significant battles and a linchpin of tourism in Vicksburg.

Car pins sleeping man to wall in his home

CA RIVERSIDE — A man sleeping in his bedroom was pinned against a wall when a car smashed through the house in Southern California, authorities said.

The man suffered only minor injuries after the vehicle barreled over a power pole, through two yards and into the home in Riverside, fire officials said.

The car almost completely entered the structure, rendering it uninhabitable, the Press-Enterprise reported. Firefighters used the Jaws of Life, a tool normally employed to cut open smashed vehicles, to free the man.

Police arrested the driver of the car, a 22-year-old man. He could face charges including driving under the influence of alcohol causing injury and DUI with a blood-alcohol level higher than 0.08 causing injury, both felonies, the newspaper said.

Pilot struck by his own airplane propeller

DE NEW CASTLE — A Delaware man was injured after he was hit in the head by his single-engine airplane's propeller, state Port Authority officials confirmed.

First responders were called to the New Castle Airport where they found the Wilmington pilot unresponsive, Delaware Bay Port Authority officials told news outlets. Investigators determined that the man had gotten out of his plane to start it manually when the propeller hit him in the head, according to Port Authority.

The man was taken to a hospital, but authorities haven't given an update on his condition, The Delaware News Journal reported.

'Eekameek' found after 2-year manhunt

FL FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. — A fugitive sought in a Florida slaying was captured after a two-year manhunt.

Court records showed that Terrance Bernard Warner Jr., 29, was jailed on a first-degree murder charge. Warner and a second man are accused in the fatal shooting of Clifton Afflick-Laidley, 31, outside a Broward County restaurant in 2018.

The South Florida Sun-Sentinel reported that police said Warner and Jimard Mitchard Fox, 29, had been arguing with Afflick-Laidley in the parking lot of the Fabulous Southern Cooking Restaurant before the shooting occurred.

Authorities said that one reason it took so long to find Warner was that witnesses only knew him by his nickname, "Eekameek."

From wire reports

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Merrimack makes history in D-I debut

Associated Press

NORTH ANDOVER, Mass. — About 25 miles north of Boston, in a 1,500-seat gymnasium in a quiet nook just off State Route 125, Joe Gallo is busy teaching basketball.

Arms folded as he walks the length of the court, Gallo watches as a ball gets away from one of his players during a practice drill and ricochets off the bottom of the retractable bleachers.

“We don’t stop competing!” Gallo shouts. “Compete! Compete! Compete!”

Welcome to Merrimack College, home of one of the biggest surprises in college basketball this season.

After spending most of the program’s 70-year existence at the Division II level, the Warriors weren’t expected to be more than a blip in the NCAA’s top division in the first year of reclassifying.

That was underscored in the preseason when, despite coming off three straight Division II tournament appearances, the

Northeast Conference coaches picked Merrimack to finish last among the league’s 11 schools.

The Warriors smashed those expectations in their season finale Thursday, clinching at least a share of the regular-season NEC championship with a 69-58 win over Central Connecticut. Merrimack (20-11) is the first school in NCAA history to win a regular-season conference title in its first Division I season. A loss by Saint Francis (Pa.) in its finale on Saturday gave the Warriors the championship outright. The Warriors’ 20 wins are also a record by a first-year reclassifying school.

The one thing Merrimack won’t have this season is a place in March Madness.

By NCAA rule, the Warriors are ineligible to compete in their conference tournament or the NCAA Tournament until they become full Division I members in the 2023-24 season. They are, however, eligible to play in the College Basketball Invitational or CollegeInsider.com Postseason Tournament.

Even with the NCAAs off the

table, Gallo said his team remains excited for whatever is next.

“Each one of those steps along the way has been a different form of motivation,” Gallo said. “You know, at first it was, ‘Well, we’ll show we’re not just a Division II team.’ And then it was, ‘OK. These guys want to pick us last.’ ... So there’s been a lot of milestones along the way that we’ve been able to use for motivation for these guys.”

New England’s only Catholic Augustinian college, Merrimack’s athletic programs began with men’s hockey in 1955, winning a Division II national title in 1978. But as Division II became more regionalized, the Division I programs like Boston College, Boston University and Northeastern were penalized for playing D-II teams.

Merrimack slowly grew to have 24 men’s and women’s varsity programs, though only the men’s and women’s hockey programs competed at the Division I level in Hockey East.

Coming off a conference tournament championship in

the final season in Division II, Gallo went into the preseason believing his team could do well on the next level.

That perception took a hit when the Warriors opened the season with a 20-point loss at Maine.

Gallo, who played for Merrimack under coach Bert Hammel before succeeding him in 2016, remembers sleeping for about an hour that night. He pondered what had happened to the senior-driven, defensive-minded roster that had carried his team the previous three seasons.

Two nights later came a trip to face the Big Ten’s Northwestern.

The Warriors trailed 55-50 with 9½ minutes remaining before using a 17-4 run to propel them to a 71-61 win.

Merrimack also beat Army, but struggled at times during a 6-7 start to the nonconference portion of the schedule. Things changed when they opened conference play by winning 10 of their first 11. They finished 14-4.

College basketball roundup

Fourth-ranked Baylor oulasts Texas Tech in overtime

Associated Press

WACO, Texas — With the shot clock winding down in overtime and a defender in his face, Baylor guard MaCio Teague quickly stepped back behind the line and hit a three-pointer.

“That was crazy, saved the day like Superman,” Bears guard Jared Butler said.

Teague made that big shot with 1:13 left in overtime, and Butler made two free throws after his steal with 11 seconds left as the No. 4 Bears held on for a 71-68 win over Texas Tech on Monday night that kept them in contention for their first Big 12 title and a No. 1 seed in the NCAA Tournament.

After Teague’s three made it 69-65, Kyler Edwards hit

a three for Texas Tech to cut the lead to one. The Red Raiders then had a chance to take the lead after Freddie Gillespie missed inside. But short-handed Baylor (26-3, 15-2 Big 12) was able to seal the win after Butler’s steal when Chris Clarke tried to make a pass inside over the Baylor guard, who was quickly fouled.

Devonte Bando had 18 points and Butler 17 for the Bears, who had lost two of their previous three games after a Big 12-record 23-game winning streak that had knocked them out of the No. 1 spot in the AP Top 25 poll. Teague had 14 points, five in overtime, and Gillespie grabbed 10 rebounds.

“It was tough losing to TCU (on Saturday). ... Guys are banged up and it was a quick turnaround,” Butler said. “It just takes the will to win, and commitment. There’s nothing you can draw up for this win. It’s just the will to win and that’s what you saw.”

Davide Moretti was tightly defended by Davion Mitchell, despite his four fouls, when he took a wild three-pointer at the end that wasn’t close for Texas Tech (18-12, 9-8).

No. 12 Duke 88, N.C. State 69: Freshman Cassius Stanley scored 14 of his 18 points after halftime as the host Blue Devils took over in the second half to beat the Wolfpack.

Fellow rookie Vernon Carey Jr. added 17 points for Duke,

which shot 63% after halftime and had a run of 17 straight scoring possessions to build a big lead. The Blue Devils also dominated N.C. State on the glass (46-27), while their move away from their man and pressure defenses to deploy a zone late in the first half took the Wolfpack out of their early aggressive rhythm.

It was quite a reversal for Duke (24-6, 14-5 Atlantic Coast Conference), which lost the first meeting 88-66 in Raleigh less than two weeks ago for Mike Krzyzewski’s most lopsided loss to an unranked opponent in his four decades leading the program. It was also a welcome response after back-to-back losses on the road.

Grand jury to examine Skaggs' death

Los Angeles Times

TEMPE, Ariz. — A Texas grand jury has been hearing evidence that could form the basis for criminal charges related to the death of Los Angeles Angels pitcher Tyler Skaggs, two people familiar with the matter told the Los Angeles Times.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because of the ongoing proceedings.

Erin Dooley, a spokeswoman for the United States attorney's office for the Northern District of Texas, told the Times via email: "I'm afraid I don't have anything on the Skaggs matter for you at the moment."

Laurie Levenson, a professor at Loyola Law School in Los Angeles and former federal prosecutor, called the involvement of a grand jury "significant."

Said Levenson: "It means there's at least some concern about how widespread this incident might be by those who provided drugs, were involved in the activities, knew about them, may have made misrepresentations, whatever the connection might be."

Skaggs was 27 when he died in his Texas hotel room July 1, hours after the Angels arrived on a flight from California. An autopsy revealed that Skaggs aspirated, with

a mixture of fentanyl, oxycodone and alcohol in his system.

In October, the Times reported that at least six players with the Angels at the time of Skaggs' death had been interviewed by agents of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration.

Eric Kay, the Angels' director of communications at the time of Skaggs' death, told agents he illegally obtained six oxycodone pills and gave three to Skaggs several days before the team left California for Texas, ESPN reported in October. Kay said he had previously provided oxycodone to Skaggs and had abused it with him for years.

Corner market: Rangers rely on critical free agents Frazier, Bird

Associated Press

Todd Frazier and Greg Bird are at opposite corners for the Texas Rangers, and at different stages in their careers.

Frazier clearly wasn't the top choice at third base for the Rangers, considering their well-publicized pursuit of top free agent Anthony Rendon this offseason. But the former two-time All-Star can provide some veteran stability after six different players started at the hot corner for Texas last season following the retirement of Adrian Beltre.

"I'm just trying to be who I am, and trying to maintain that position," said the 34-year-old Frazier, with his fifth team and going into his 10th big league season. "So for me, play the defense I know how, focus on driving guys in, and the rest will take care of itself."

The 27-year-old Bird signed a nonroster deal before spring training, getting an opportunity to compete to be the Rangers' first baseman after being plagued by a series of injuries the past five years with the New York Yankees.

"He's an impressive, impressive kid," Rangers manager Chris Woodward said. "His approach to the plate, he doesn't swing at balls, which is a good

one for me. But also when he gets strikes, he does a lot of damage. And talking to him, that mentality matches obviously the performance on the field."

Teammates during the second half of the 2017 season with the New York Yankees, Frazier and Bird now have lockers next to each other in the Rangers' spring training clubhouse in Surprise, Ariz.

Frazier spent the past two seasons with the New York Mets. Bird played only 82 games for the Yankees in 2018 after ankle surgery, then was limited to 10 games at the start of last season before being sidelined by a plantar fascia tear in his left foot.

The Rangers knew it wouldn't be easy to replace Beltre. The four-time All-Star and five-time Gold Glove winner with 3,166 career hits retired after the 2018 season.

Former two-time All-Star shortstop Asdrubal Cabrera was signed last offseason and switched to third base. He filled that spot until being released right after the trade deadline, then played primarily second base the rest of the season for the World Series champion Washington Nationals.

After Rendon left the Nation-

als and opted for a seven-year deal with the Los Angeles Angels early in free agency, the Rangers were consistently mentioned as possible landing spots for Nolan Arenado from Colorado or Kris Bryant from the Chicago Cubs when it seemed that one of those All-Star third basemen could possibly be traded.

Frazier signed with the Rangers in mid-January, a \$3.5 million deal for this season that includes a 2021 club option with a \$1.5 million buyout.

"Todd, he's been around a while, and brings a lot of energy, a lot of passion to the game," Woodward said. "He represents a lot of what we preach internally, just his attitude."

The right-handed Bird became a free agent in November when he refused an outright assignment to Triple-A, and was a bit surprised by an offer from the Rangers.

But Texas had five different players start at first base last season. Ronald Guzman, a young left-hander who is a strong defender, had the most starts with 72, but hit only .134 against lefties. General manager Jon Daniels said Bird was signed to compete for the job, not to just be part of a platoon situation.

Markakis leads Braves by example

Associated Press

FORT MYERS, Fla. — As he searched for the best things Atlanta Braves outfielder Nick Markakis brings to the team, bench coach Walt Weiss shared several.

"He's one of those guys that's the conscience of the team," Weiss said.

Markakis made some of the strongest comments this spring about the Houston Astros sign-stealing scandal.

The soundbite — "I feel every single guy over there deserves a beating" — is what most people heard. But his other comments on how this affected baseball's integrity spoke more about Markakis.

"I know we're all competitors, we're out to compete, but there are right ways to do it and wrong ways to do it. I 100% disagree with the way they did it. A lot of people were hurt by it."

Weiss wasn't surprised by what Markakis said. "That fire runs pretty deep," he said.

"When you see something with our team, it gets guys thinking, 'Should we do this, should we not do this?'" Weiss said. "Let's watch Nicky or ask him to see if this is what we should be doing. That's powerful."

NBA roundup

Heat top Bucks for 2nd time this season

Associated Press

MIAMI — The Miami Heat stand alone, the first team to beat the Milwaukee Bucks twice this season.

Jae Crowder and Jimmy Butler each scored 18 points, Goran Dragic added 15 and the Heat beat the Bucks 105-89 on Wednesday night — moving to 2-0 against the NBA's best team.

Bam Adebayo had 14 points and 13 rebounds for Miami, which improved to 39-22 and matched its win total from last season with 21 games remaining. Kendrick Nunn had 13 points and Kelly Olynyk added 11 for the Heat.

"Collective effort," Crowder said. "All hands on deck."

It was a season-low in points for the Bucks, set for the second straight day after Milwaukee managed only 93 in a win on Sunday at Charlotte. The difference was from the three-

point line: Miami was 18-for-37, the Bucks were 7-for-34.

"Not saying we can hold great offensive teams like this regularly under 90 ... but we have it in us to do it more consistently," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said.

Milwaukee has faced 21 of the 29 other NBA teams more than once this season.

Knicks 125, Rockets 123: Rookie guard RJ Barrett tied his season high with 27 points and host New York snapped Houston's six-game winning streak.

The Knicks pummeled the small-ball Rockets on the boards and in the paint to make a successful first impression in front of Leon Rose, the longtime player agent who was hired Monday as team president.

Pacers 116, Spurs 111: Malcolm Brogdon scored 26 points, T.J. Warren added 23 and Indiana rallied to win at

San Antonio after blowing a 15-point lead.

The Pacers won their fourth straight, moving into a tie for fifth-place with Philadelphia in the Eastern Conference.

Bulls 109, Mavericks 107: Coby White scored 19 points, Otto Porter Jr. added 18 in his return from a broken left foot and host Chicago hung on to beat Dallas when Luka Doncic's desperation heave bounced off the rim.

Denzel Valentine added a season-high 17 points and the Bulls won for just the second time in 12 games even though leading scorer Zach LaVine sat out with a strained left quadriceps.

Grizzlies 127, Hawks 88: Gorgui Dieng had 17 points and 10 rebounds, leading nine Memphis scorers in double figures, and the Grizzlies pulled away in the second half to win at Atlanta.

Memphis, trying to protect

its No. 8 spot in the Western Conference playoff field, has won two straight following five consecutive losses.

Jazz 126, Cavaliers 113: Bojan Bogdanovic scored 28 points, Rudy Gobert added 20 and Utah began a four-game trip with a win at Cleveland, which dressed only nine players and used just seven.

Donovan Mitchell had 19 points and nine rebounds, and the Jazz made 20 three-pointers while staying in the fifth Western Conference playoff spot.

Trail Blazers 130, Magic 107: CJ McCollum scored 41 points and Gary Trent Jr. added 24 to help Portland roll to a win at Orlando.

Hassan Whiteside had 16 points and 13 rebounds and Trevor Ariza scored 11 as the Blazers ended a three-game losing streak by outscoring the Magic 38-19 in the final period.

NHL roundup

O'Connor's breakaway goal lifts Avs over Red Wings

Associated Press

DETROIT — Gabriel Landeskog withstood a crunching hit while making a pass that sprung Logan O'Connor for a breakaway goal in the second period, and the Colorado Avalanche beat the Detroit Red Wings 2-1 on Monday night for their seventh consecutive victory.

Vladislav Namestnikov also scored for the Avalanche, who extended a franchise record with their ninth consecutive road win. Anthony Mantha had the only goal for the Red Wings.

With the score tied at 1, Landeskog was just inside his own blue line when he took a hit from Detroit's Robby Fabbri. As he was clocked, Landeskog released a pass up the ice to

O'Connor, who was behind the defense at the other blue line.

"That was a selfless play. That's why he wears the 'C,' obviously," O'Connor said. "That was a great pass by him — great look that set up the whole opportunity there."

O'Connor went in and beat goalie Jonathan Bernier for his second goal of the season.

Mantha converted off a goal-mouth scramble to open the scoring in the first, but Colorado equalized before the period was over.

Ryan Graves took a shot that slipped through Bernier, and Namestnikov kicked the puck to himself in the crease and then stuffed it in the net with his stick.

O'Connor was called up from the AHL on Saturday, and Namestnikov arrived from Ot-

tawa in a recent trade.

"I think that's Vlad's best game since he's been here," Avalanche coach Jared Bednar said.

"I think that's his third one. It looked like his first game, he was thinking too much. Second game he got a little bit better, a little more involved."

Oilers 8, Predators 3: Leon Draisaitl, the NHL's scoring leader, had the first four-goal game of his career and added an assist as Edmonton won at Nashville to sweep the season series.

"I don't need to beat around the bush," Draisaitl said. "When you score four goals, you feel good. You feel good about yourself, you feel good about your linemates. Obviously, they made some great plays to me tonight and made it

pretty easy for me."

Connor McDavid scored the go-ahead goal in the third period and had four assists. Kailer Yamamoto and Josh Archibald each had a goal and an assist, and Zack Kassian also scored as the Oilers won their second straight.

Ryan Nugent-Hopkins and Darnell Nurse had three assists apiece.

The Predators had dominated Edmonton lately, including 13 straight wins between 2014 and 2018. These aren't those Oilers, though. Edmonton is second in the Pacific Division and pulled within two points of first-place Vegas with a game in hand.

The Oilers broke open a tie game by scoring three of their five goals in the third in a span of 2:21.